

GEAR UP Hawaii serves over 16,000 students each year from low-income and underserved communities throughout the State in grades 7 through 12 and in their first year in college. The program equips students with the tools they need to succeed in college and their careers. GEAR UP delivers a number of services to students, including supporting early college-level academic preparation in high school, providing opportunities for early college options, increasing college access and financial aid information to students and families, and advising students during their first year of college to increase first-year completion. GEAR UP Hawaii has gained national recognition for its success in closing the achievement gap among groups traditionally underrepresented in higher education and helping low-income students prepare for college.

Through its collaborative partnerships between Hawaii's State Department of Education, K-12 schools, the University of Hawaii, local businesses, and community organizations, GEAR UP Hawaii inspires students to see postsecondary education as something they can achieve. The early outreach GEAR UP Hawaii performs is key to improving access to postsecondary education for students from low-income families in our State.

The program's results demonstrate that GEAR UP Hawaii is making significant strides towards increasing the number of low-income students who are prepared for and enroll in college. For example, 20 percent of Step Up Scholars, a GEAR UP Hawaii program, graduated from high school in June 2015 with the Board of Education Recognition Diploma, BOERD, compared to 14 percent of students statewide. The BOERD is an honors diploma that requires students to earn a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 and complete a senior project. Additionally, GEAR UP has increased the availability of High School Based Running Start, HBRs, courses, which allow high school students to attend University of Hawaii classes to earn both high school and college credits. For the Hawaii class of 2014, 83 percent of students who took at least one HBRs course enrolled in college the semester after graduation compared to the statewide average of 56 percent. Thanks to these programs, thousands of Hawaii's students graduate from high school every year better prepared for college and for their futures.

A college education is a path of opportunity for our students. GEAR UP Hawaii has been and will continue to be critical in supporting the State's goal of having 55 percent of working-age adults in the State earn a college degree by 2025. I commend GEAR UP Hawaii for the vital role it plays in helping Hawaii's students access and excel in their higher education.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

REMEMBERING BEN CRAIG

• Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, all who knew Ben Craig know that his passing marks the loss of an exceptional family man, local leader, and community banker. Ben was a great neighbor and a shining example of a Kansan who improved the lives of all he knew.

The youngest of five children, Ben was born in 1929 to Benjamin D. Craig, Sr., and Orpha (Cox) Craig. He grew up and went to school in Baxter Springs, where he was an avid baseball player and sports fan. During high school, he was the pitcher for the Baxter Whiz Kids, the local regional team.

He attended the University of Kansas, and during his college years, he pursued his minor league baseball dreams playing with the New York Yankees and the St. Louis Browns.

After the Korean war began in 1950, Ben enlisted in the Air Force and spent 18 months stationed in Tripoli, Libya. Following his deployment, he returned to the States and was stationed at Sewart Air Force Base near Nashville, TN. He was joined by his new bride, Evadean Talbot, who he married after returning home from Tripoli. In 1954, he was honorably discharged from the service as an E-5 tech sergeant.

Ben's long career in business began after leaving the Air Force when he took a job with the Cassville, MO, chamber of commerce. He later worked with the Kansas City, KS, chamber before beginning a banking career that would span decades. Ben served as president of Metcalf Bank in Kansas City for 35 years and then as chairman of the board until 2007. When the bank was sold in 2007, Ben remained on the board of directors and served as chairman emeritus until his death.

In addition to strengthening the Kansas City economy with his work in the banking community, where small businesses and families alike could depend on Ben for solid financial assistance and advice, Ben served in leadership positions in a number of local charities and service organizations. For 52 years, he had perfect attendance in the Overland Park Rotary Club, which is where I first met him. He also played a key role in establishing many of the Kansas City institutions we know today, such as Johnson County Community College, Shawnee Mission Medical Center, and the Overland Park Chamber of Commerce.

Ben was preceded in death by his wife of 52 years, Evadean. He leaves behind his friend and companion of the last 10 years, Vivian Sirratt, along with his daughters, Denise Koonse (Charles), Kellee Hearst (Rex), granddaughters, Amanda Lubiewski (Michael), Kelsey Houchen (Andrew), and great-granddaughters, Abigail and Emily Lubiewski.

Ben's dedication to public service and constant desire to find ways he could help others will benefit generations of

Kansans to come. He had a kind heart and giving nature. Ben was a natural leader who freely gave his time to all he knew. I am thankful for my friendship with him. May he rest in peace.●

REMEMBERING RODGER MCCONNELL

• Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, on July 21, 2016, shortly before his 72nd birthday, the United States lost a great man, an outstanding soldier, and an unparalleled advocate for his fellow veterans—and I lost a great friend. Rodger McConnell's legacy will be forever remembered as one of perseverance, passion, a humbling work ethic, and an enduring love of Starbucks coffee.

Born in August 1944, Rodger graduated high school in 1962 and found employment with a local gas company for several years.

Answering the call of duty, Rodger enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1966. He saw combat in Vietnam as a cavalry troop forward observer for mortars and artillery with the 9th Infantry Division and the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment before his honorable discharge a year later.

In his postwar years, Rodger overcame several personal hardships, including homelessness and posttraumatic stress disorder, but he remained undaunted and undefeated. It was these struggles that created an empathetic man, who became a tireless and fearless advocate for other struggling veterans.

Eventually receiving a liberal arts degree from Carroll College and a master's degree in K-12 education from Montana State University-Northern, Rodger spent several years as an educator before he retired in 2003 and launched into his unwavering service for veterans in Cascade County.

Working with State District Judge Greg Pinski, Rodger helped create a veterans court to help veterans navigate the justice system and get the help and treatment they need to get back on their feet. Rodger also played a pivotal role in constructing the Montana Veterans Memorial, which serves as a landmark in Great Falls to honor those who have served.

Most notably, Rodger spearheaded the "Stand Down" event in Great Falls, providing veterans with clothing and access to job training and health services. Through this important event, Rodger made a difference in the lives of hundreds of veterans.

Rodger was also an extremely active volunteer, contributing to the Great Falls community by registering voters, hosting a radio show on a local Great Falls station, and volunteering with the local Optimist Club.

In Rodger's eyes, the community was his family, and he was theirs.

Let us now take a moment to recognize the exceptional life of Rodger McConnell and the legacy he left behind. It is a legacy I hope each of us can aspire towards.●